

Derrick Knutson, *Southwest Review News*

People looking for a speedy mode of public transportation between the Twin Cities and its southern suburbs can now at least contemplate new possibilities after a federal grant was awarded to study alternative transit options along Robert Street.

U.S. Congresswoman Betty McCollum, DFL, announced Dec. 17 the Robert Street Transit Corridor will receive a \$1.18 million federal grant from the federal Department of Transportation. Funds will go to the Dakota County Railroad Authority to support the evaluation of transit alternatives between the Union Depot in downtown St. Paul and Rosemount. The projected competed with transit corridors all across the country to secure the funds.

"I am a long-time supporter of expanding transit options for the residents and businesses along the Robert Street corridor," McCollum said in a press release. "Federal partnership in this effort is going to help communities in Dakota County move ahead with their vision. The Robert Street corridor is an important part of a comprehensive, multi-modal transportation system in the Twin Cities."

The funds have been awarded, but the specific type of transportation that might link downtown St. Paul with the cities of West St. Paul, South St. Paul, Mendota Heights, Inver Grove Heights and Rosemount has not yet been decided.

"We're still in the exploratory phase," West St. Paul Mayor John Zannmiller said. "By no means are we breaking ground for any mass transit right now. We have to look at a lot of things before we do anything, and that's what this money will help us do."

Zannmiller said city officials in municipalities along Robert Street have been mulling over transit options for the Robert Street corridor for about the past five years with state officials, and he's eager to start studying how more effective public transportation could positively affect West St. Paul and surrounding communities.

"There's a need for transportation and getting more people into the city," Zannmiller said. "Robert Street and Highway 52 only have a certain amount of capacity."

Peter Frosh, McCollum's legislative director, explained that effective public transportation could meet the needs for businesses along the corridor and people who already live there, especially seniors who might not be very mobile and would be able to utilize an effective public transit system.

He agreed with Zannmiller's assertion that the area is already congested, and population is only going to increase over the coming years.

"It's a quickly growing area," he said. "Dakota County and the municipalities along the corridor have been looking at that area for a long time and envisioning alternative transportation options."

Zannmiller echoed Frosh's sentiment about expanded public transit being a boost to economic development along the corridor, and said he's looking forward to finding out how West St. Paul could directly benefit from alternative transportation.

"It would give people an additional way to shop, eat and play in West St. Paul," he said.

Zannmiller added, "This puts us on the radar with other parts of the Twin Cities metro area. This is the first step. We want to make this a part of the larger mass transit radar for the next generation."